

**Minutes of CRASC Meeting
USFWS Regional Office
Hadley, Massachusetts
November 15, 2000**

1. Introductory Comments

Chair Duncan McInnes opened the meeting at 10:06 a.m., welcoming new Commissioners and Congressional aides. The Chair pointed out that the focus of the meeting was U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) funding which has proven inadequate for meeting Connecticut River Atlantic Salmon Restoration Program commitments. Service budget shortfalls are, in this way, a threat to the concurrent investments of all the cooperating agencies, organizations and industry. Attempts to resolve the funding issues were initiated but unsuccessful in FY2001.

2. Summary Accomplishment Report for 2000 from the Technical Committee Chair

Technical Committee Chair, Jay McMenemy, provided a summary of Program activities in 2000 (attached). Highlights include:

- Release of over nine million Atlantic salmon fry throughout the basin with help from hundreds of volunteers
- Release of 48,000 Atlantic salmon smolts - the most since 1994
- Loss of the next two year classes of pre-smolts at the Pittsford NFH because of disease and predation
- Allocation of surplus adult Atlantic salmon broodstock from hatcheries for recreational fisheries
- Spawning of adult Atlantic salmon in hatcheries which has again produced egg quantities exceeding available incubation capacity
- Cutting-edge genetic research disrupted by Service funding/staffing issues
- Completion of fishway improvements by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers at the Townshend dam on the West River
- Disappointing number of adult salmon returns (77), a trend predicted and paralleled elsewhere
- Release of 10 radio-tagged adult salmon by PG&E, permitting biologists to track salmon spawning migration as far north as the Black and West Rivers in Vermont

3. Congressional Funding Process, Time Lines & Information Requirements

Mr. Bob Paquin, Legislative Assistant to Senator Patrick Leahy, initiated his presentation on the Congressional funding process by enlisting participation and introduction of the other Congressional staff, including: Mr. Tom Berry, Mr. Dustin May, Mr. Mike Vito, Mr. Jon Niedzielski, and Ms. Lisa Perrone.

The Congressional funding process is fairly predictable and basically the same for the House and Senate: Generally, the President's Budget is released in February. Committee staff look for State, regional and national recommendations on that budget from February until as late as mid-March. This is the time to write letters. Congress reviews the budget, holds hearings, presents their own mark-ups and the budget goes to conference some time in September with the objective of having a signed budget in place by October 1st.

What happens to funding requests depends on the process. If the Executive Office has proposed specific funding for the Service in the DOI bill, it will remain. If instead the funding is first proposed in the House mark-up, it will usually remain. If the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee makes the proposal, it will generally remain. Otherwise, it is very difficult to get an add to the President's budget in the form of an amendment.

Mr. Paquin said that operations of specific offices differ and then offered information on how Senator Leahy receives input and recommendations on the budget. There are five key avenues for input:

- Staff actively seek input especially from the State of Vermont
- Staff actively inventory facilities and programs in Vermont
- Staff develop joint funding requests with other legislators - examples include CRASC, CRJC, and AHR; These requests carry increased weight and tend to be less partisan
- Direct requests from constituents
- Good ideas received throughout the year are saved for the next budget cycle

Once an idea is recommended and determined to be worthy of a mark-up, it is up to the Congressional aides to craft the language that ensures an add (verses an earmark).

Mr. Paquin proposed to have Senator Leahy host a meeting in Washington to include all House and Senate Offices to discuss a joint appropriations subcommittee recommendation for CRASC. It was suggested that CRASC pull together others or interests of others, such as CRWC, CRJC, AHR, USACOE-Flood Commission, SOCNFWR, for the meeting. The meeting will serve to update new Congressional staff. Presentations should include information on the Program history, legislative mandate, accomplishments, state and federal funding, and how the cooperative pieces fit together. The best time for such a meeting is as early in January as possible. Leahy's staff can manage the Washington invitations, but the CRASC and Coordinator should develop the presentation and decide on specific basin participants.

Ms. Perrone agreed that such a meeting would be invaluable. She added that the Connecticut Congressional coalition was strong and would likely be supportive of a win-win proposal, such as discussed, from the CRASC. Ms.

Peronne requested that we keep information coming to her office on CRASC events and press releases.

Mr. Berry also agreed that a Washington meeting was a great idea. He said that the advantage of such a meeting is that staffers will be given immediate assignments that will accelerate the process. He suggested that NGOs participate in this process. They carry a different perspective. They can lobby directly. Their interest is specifically important. This may be a part of the Washington meeting or it may be orchestrated independently but is nevertheless a key component. He suggested that the meeting presentations follow a common vision and that needs are identified in priority order.

Commissioner Ed Parker indicated a strong interest in pursuing such a meeting with the State Commissioners present and participating.

Chair McInnes reported that Senator Gregg's staff had previously indicated interest and support for such an idea.

4. State Program Accomplishments, Program Value, and Value of State/Federal Partnership to Program Success

The State presentations were omitted in the interest of time.

5. USFWS Budget, Program Accomplishments and Program Value

Dr. Jaime Geiger, USFWS Assistant Regional Director-Fisheries, presented a summary (attached) of Service activities by State. He also discussed Program concerns and needs:

- The Connecticut River Migratory Fish Restoration Program is synergistic in that contributions of all partners combine into an interdependent whole greater than the sum of its parts with benefits to each of the basin States
- The combined efforts have successfully returned hundreds of thousands of migratory fish to the river including shad and salmon
- Partners have recently instituted cutting-edge science in hatchery production and fisheries management, changing a centuries-old approach to fish restoration
- The Restoration Program has a strong grass roots component
- Flat funding in the Service, combined with increased costs, decrease Service capability to meet Restoration Program commitments
- Similar funding concerns preclude the partners from shouldering the burden of Service commitments
- Additional funding for the Service and States is needed to ensure that basin-wide goals for migratory fish and habitat restoration are achieved

6. Telephone Hook-Up with USFWS Acting RD in DC on USFWS Commitment and Opportunity for Questions & Group Discussion on Program Funding and Needs

Dr. Mamie Parker, Acting Regional Director, addressed the CRASC by speaker-phone from Washington. Dr. Parker had three points to emphasize:

- The Connecticut River Atlantic Salmon Restoration Program is a high priority in the Northeast
- Without additional funds, the Service will not be able to meet commitments to the Connecticut Program
- Any additional funds accrued to the Connecticut Program through the actions of CRASC will remain in the Connecticut Program

Dr. Parker then launched a discussion answering questions from the CRASC and other meeting participants.

Mr. Tom Maloney, Connecticut River Watershed Council, asked how the NGOs should promote this funding request given concurrent needs elsewhere?

Dr. Parker said that the Watershed Council can be specific about what they support, use a cooperative inclusive approach to address needs rather a competitive or exclusive approach, and realize that Service programs are funded separately through Fisheries, Refuges and Ecological Services.

Mr. Dan Call, Westfield River Watershed Association, commented on the importance of public outreach/education and citizen involvement in the Restoration Program. He pledged to continue the Watershed's Association's efforts in this arena.

Dr. Parker agreed on the importance of outreach. She said that it was important for the public to understand and relate to the Program. She also speculated that we hadn't done enough to promote the Program's successes.

Commissioner Ron Regan commended Dr. Parker for her positive tone in reaching out to the individual Commissioners regarding Service funding issues. He pointed out that the States have been requested to help the Service in managing staffing problems at the White River National Fish Hatchery. The staffing problems are a result of inadequate Service funding. Despite tight State budgets, the cooperators have agreed to assist because of the importance of the cooperative effort to salmon restoration. Commissioner Regan inquired whether the Service had any additional flexibility to move existing staff or to hire seasonals to address these issues?

Dr. Parker was empathetic to Commissioner Regan's concerns. She pointed out that the Service is in a position of having to "rob Peter to pay Paul," and when that is not possible we are asking the States to do this for us. She then charged Dr. Geiger with assessing the feasibility of sharing staff perhaps involving the entire Connecticut River/Long Island Sound Ecosystem Team.

Commissioner Wayne MacCallum also complimented Dr. Parker on her efforts to apprise and involve the State Commissioners. He appreciated the substance contained in Dr. Geiger's presentation and especially appreciated the Service's explanation of how priorities are set including the written commitment to salmon restoration. He indicated that this made a difference in the Massachusetts budget process in which he is involved. Despite a 5% cut, Commissioner MacCallum maintained salmon restoration funding in his State budget because of the Service's expressed commitment.

Mr. John O'Leary, Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, reported that local stewardship for natural resources, including habitat, is a priority in the Connecticut River where he is a Team Leader. Mr. O'Leary explained that he was fortunate to be able to stock Atlantic salmon fry because this is an effective tool to develop such community stewardship. The cooperative effort is a thread that runs through the fry stocking program where salmon eggs are taken from adult fish held at the Roger Reed State Fish Hatchery, for example, incubated at a the White River National Fish Hatchery, returned to the state hatchery when partially developed, hatched at the state hatchery and released via a cooperative state federal effort with citizen assistance. This effort is an example of how we routinely meet CRASC and MAEOEA goals.

Dr. Parker agreed that the key is to share and care for the people working in the Restoration Program, including our partners and to continue Program promotion.

Mr. Charlie Olchowski, Deerfield/Millers River Chapter of Trout Unlimited, spoke for 150 local members. Trout Unlimited initiated a cooperative hands-on education program, the Atlantic Salmon Egg Rearing Program, with the Service, MAEOEA, and MAFW several seasons ago. The effort is totally dependent on partnership since none of the cooperators can manage it independently. Thirteen schools in Franklin County and two schools in Hamden County are currently involved. The objective is develop a stewardship ethic among community youth in the watershed. Mr. Olchowski described an example of success at the Leverett Elementary School where Ms. Joan Godsey has focused her entire science curriculum around the ASERP project. Just a year ago, an adult female returned to the Sawmill River. She utilized existing habitat to dig a gravel nest or redd for her eggs in the stream bottom. When the salmon spawned, her eggs were successfully fertilized by mature parr that were residing in the river. These parr may well have been there as a result of the ASERP salmon releases in the river. Ms. Godsey's students were able to deduce this possibility and feel pride in their successful role as active stewards in the restoration program.

Dr. Parker hailed the success and added that such projects reach beyond students to touch teachers and parents alike.

Mr. Paquin reiterated his offer to host an informational briefing with Senate and House staff participation in January 2001. He indicated that Dr. Geiger's presentation is integral and encouraged the CRASC to develop recommendations for the Appropriations Subcommittee.

Dr. Parker thanked Mr. Paquin and Senator Leahy recognizing assistance they have delivered to the White River and Pittsford National Fish Hatcheries. She agreed that there is more power in numbers and suggested that Mr. Paquin also invite Loretta Beaumont and other Appropriations Subcommittee staff to the briefing. She also recommended that the CRASC invite Loretta Beaumont to the basin next spring so that she can observe what we have cooperatively accomplished.

Mr. Paquin agreed to invite Ms. Beaumont and the Subcommittee.

Mr. Berry said that he was not familiar with the Connecticut River Atlantic Salmon Compact and requested that we bring the legislation to the briefing for discussion.

Mr. Ken Bergstrom, Western Massachusetts Center for Sustainable Aquaculture, thanked the Service for assistance and support in re-opening the Berkshire National Fish Hatchery. The Center's efforts have been supported by a grant from the Massachusetts Department of Food and Agriculture. He said that students recently assisted in spawning Atlantic salmon at the hatchery and that they hope to have salmon fry available for stocking next spring.

Mr. Maloney reported that the Watershed Council had just received funding pre-approval from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation for a watershed-wide migratory fish program. He was looking forward to implementing the project since people really get excited about this type of work.

Commissioner Tom Menard mentioned that Mr. Vito requested the CRASC to develop coordinate those non-Washington cooperators who should attend the briefing.

Mr. David Deen, Connecticut River Watershed Council, thanked the attending Congressional staff for taking the time to participate in this CRASC meeting.

Commissioner Regan asked Dr. Geiger why Service funding appeared to increase (after funding tables were reviewed). Dr. Geiger replied that overall funding had increased but that the increases were pass-throughs or earmarks and, as such, were rendered effectively useless to the Connecticut Restoration Program. The 2000 budget remains draft as of this date.

Mr. Mitch King, USFWS Acting Deputy Regional Director, suggested that a funding package be developed as soon as possible regardless of typical budget process so that the CRASC will be ready to react with recommendations regardless of any unusual schedules or processes that result from the incoming administration.

Commissioner Ed Parker recommended that the CRASC identify State and Federal needs with associated cost estimates. He suggested that CRASC meet in December to establish priority among those needs. He also recommended that NGOs provide their thoughts to both the State Commissioners and the Coordinator so that their thoughts may be incorporated as appropriate.

Commissioner MacCallum pointed out that the comprehensive needs should be identified as those relating to operation and maintenance verses those for construction since the sources for these funds are different.

Commissioner Regan offered the idea that the Conte Refuge Advisory Committee is being resurrected and that this Committee might provide a natural bridge for the educational component identified by the CRASC.

Mr. Dan Kuzmeskus, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, explained that the Service has a database of operational needs which can be used to augment the long-term funding requirements for the Service. The needs identified in Dr. Geiger's presentation were short-term needs that are critical for the Service to meet immediate commitments to keep the Program alive.

Mr. King asserted that the Service Divisions all contribute something and should be included as part of the comprehensive package, as appropriate, along with the needs identified by the States and NGOs. The needs package should do more than keep the Program alive.

Ms. Perrone agreed that we should not limit the request to our minimum need. She indicated that it made better sense to address the operational backlog as long as we can still present reasonable figures. She encouraged us to demonstrate accountability and show successes.

Mr. May also encouraged the CRASC to ask for what is really needed and to recognize that requests are seldom fully funded.

Mr. King suggested that the presentation identify the risks of not getting this add - including the concurrent investments of the States, NGOs, industry and public. The partnership is important to emphasize. The anecdotes about how the program impacts the grass roots, like Joan Godsey's students, is at the heart of the strength of what we do.

The Commissioners agreed to develop materials for the Washington briefing by the already scheduled Technical Committee meeting at 10 a.m. on December 13, 2000 at the Conte Anadromous Fish Research Center in Turners Falls. They will follow with a meeting at the same time and location on December 20. The CRASC agreed to adjust their schedules to meet in January 2001 in Washington at the invitation of Senator Leahy.

7. Wrap-Up

Mr. Angie Incerpi implored the Service to be flexible while the CRASC works to get the Program over this current funding crisis. He indicated that this was an extremely important initiative. It is one more example of the importance of the existing partnership and the need to expand that partnership since there is greater strength in numbers. Mr. Incerpi commended the electric industry of which there were two attending representatives for their continuing commitment. He explained that while we focus on shad and salmon, it is important to understand that Atlantic salmon are an indicator species. They are a symbol of the cleaner river that has also delivered increased recreational opportunities and increased real estate values. Mr.

Incerpi said that we can restore salmon if we keep up the effort but that it will not happen over night. Given all we and others have already accomplished, we can do no less.

Commissioner Charlie Thoits moved to adjourn. Dr. Geiger seconded the motion and the meeting was adjourned at 1:10 p.m.

**CRASC MEETING
NOVEMBER 15, 2000
HADLEY, MA**

PARTICIPANT LIST

Name	Organization
Vermont	
Ron Regan	CRASC - VTFW
Angelo Incerpi	CRASC - VTFW
Jay McMenemy	VTFW
Doug Aloisi	USFWS - Pittsford NFH
Ken Gillette	USFWS - White River NFH
Bob Paquin	Senator Leahy
Tom Berry	Senator Jeffords
Dustin May	Representative Sanders - WO
Steve Roy	USFS
David Deen	CT River Joint Commissions & CT River Watershed Council
Dan McKinley	White River Partnership
Nat Tripp	CT River Joint Commissions
New Hampshire	
Charlie Thoits	CRASC NH Public Commissioner
Duncan McInnes	CRASC - NHFG
John Warner	USFWS - New England Field Office
Joe McKeon	USFWS - CNEAFC
Ken Sprankle	USFWS - CNEAFC
Massachusetts	
Wayne MacCallum	CRASC - MAFW
Mike Vito	Senator Kerry
Jon Niedzielski	Representative Olver
Larry Lofton	USFWS - North Attleboro NFH
Mickey Novak	USFWS - Richard Cronin NSS
Janice Rowan	USFWS - CT River Coordinator's Office
Phil Herzig	USFWS - Sunderland OFA
Steve Rideout	USGS - Conte Anadromous FRC

Tom Maloney	CT River Watershed Council
Dan Call	Westfield River Watershed Association
John O'Leary	MAEOEA
Mike Parker	MAEOEA
Charlie Olchowski	Trout Unlimited
Ken Bergstrom	W. MA Center for Sustainable Aquaculture/Berkshire NFH
Bob Stira	Northeast Utilities
John Howard	Northeast Utilities
Dave Perkins	USFWS - RO
Rick De Vergilio	NRCS
Jaime Geiger	USFWS - RO
Dan Kuzmeskus	USFWS - RO
Ron Howey	USFWS - RO
Paul Pajak	USFWS - RO
Ron Essig	USFWS - RO
Libby Hopkins	USFWS - RO
Dan Flint	USFWS - Richard Cronin National Salmon Station
Darleen Cutting	USFWS - Connecticut River Coordinator's Office
Tom Menard	CRASC MA Public Commissioner
Christian Scott	USFWS - RO
Mason Marron	Westfield River Watershed Association
Curt Orvis	USFWS - RO
Mitch King	USFWS - RO
Ben Letcher	USGS - BRD
Caleb Slater	MAFW
Connecticut	
Ed Parker	CRASC - CTDNR
Rick Jacobson	CTDEP
Steve Gephard	CTDEP
Jim Carroll	CT River Salmon Association
Lisa Perrone	Representative Larson
Bob Jones	CRASC CT Public Commissioner